

# Spiritual Gifts (Part III)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning to you all. Good morning to you all. This is a retreat. We can actually speak and respond.

Unlike church where you have to be quiet. Glad that everybody's here. Glad that you all survived the night. I hope you got a decent amount of sleep. I hear the bonfire went late. Unofficial off-book festivities went later. Hope you got sleep. It's been a great time here for most of us. I think that we're here as a final session, a final gathering of worship before we head back to D.C.

I don't know if anybody came out here simply to join us for worship. Oh, my goodness. Well done. Extra crowns in heaven for you.

Not bad, ladies. Not bad. That's fantastic. Okay. Well, in that case, a little word of introduction is in order. For some of us, this is our Sunday worship gathering.

[ 1 : 04 ] For some of us, this is the concluding session of a parish retreat on the spiritual gifts. I had always thought that after this, this would be known as the spiritual gifts retreat.

Obviously, that is not true. It will hereafter be known as the shipmaster retreat. And that was painfully obvious last night. There's nothing that we can do about it. So we have to embrace it and move on.

But as I was thinking about this final session and how to wrap up, these two passages came to mind. This amazing passage in Matthew chapter 25 that we'll look at in a little while.

And then the more guiding passage that we're going to look at, 1 Peter 4, verses 7 through 11. And this is the first one to reflect on as we have been talking about the spiritual gifts.

We've been talking about understanding the gifts, what they are in general. We've been talking about how to discern the gifts, what they are in particular. And this morning, the topic will be, what does it mean to steward those gifts well?

[ 2 : 07 ] What does it mean to be good stewards of all that God has given us? And these passages speak to that in particular.

And so first I want to look at 1 Peter 4, verses 7 through 11. And I think even for those of us who have not been here talking about spiritual gifts, this is an amazing passage. I mean, you'd be hard-pressed to find a book that does a better job explaining what ministry is.

Whether you're ministering in your church or in your job or in any other context. It's a great little primer on ministry. And the point that it makes is this, that being a Christian means being a steward. That to be a Christian is to be a steward of everything. And so we're going to look at two things here, the context of our stewardship and the exercise of our stewardship.

So let's pray as we get started. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. As we do every week, we thank you for your promise and ability to speak to us.

[ 3 : 17 ] We pray that as we open your word this morning that you would clear away the fog of a late night. That you would help the caffeine to work in our system.

That you would, above all, remove distractions and obstacles so that you can empower your word to come alive. To confront us with the reality of the gospel and the presence in the face of your son, Jesus Christ.

And it's in his name that we pray. Amen. Amen. So first of all, the context of our stewardship. I want to spend a few minutes just looking at this first verse in the passage in 1 Peter.

If you have Bibles, you can open them. If you have iPhones, you can fire them up. 1 Peter 4, verse 7. The end of all things is at hand, therefore.

And I love this. There's an amazing statement being made here. Now, when you first hear this, obviously, what do you think of?

[ 4 : 22 ] Right. And crazy people with sandwich board signs on street corners, right? The end is near. The end is near. But I want you to notice that Peter goes on to say, The end of all things is at hand, therefore.

Be self-controlled and sober-minded. You know what the word sober means in the Bible? The word sober means sane.

It's the opposite of insane or being out of your mind. So think of the demon-possessed man in Mark chapter 5. And after Jesus casts out the demons and heals him, we find the man clothed and in his right mind, right?

Same word. So what is sanity then? Sanity means the ability to correctly perceive reality, right?

So to be sober is to be sane. And to be sane is to correctly perceive reality, to see things for what they actually are. So he's saying the end of all things is at hand, therefore, it's more important now than ever before for you to see things as they really are.

[ 5 : 39 ] Be sane. Think clearly. And the reason is because the end is coming. But by end, he doesn't mean a full stop to creation.

What he actually means is a major change is coming. A major transition in history is upon us. February 28, 2002.

That was the official date on which national currencies in many parts of Europe ceased to be legal tender. And the euro became the only acceptable currency.

February 28, 2002. Before that date, there was a period of overlap. So there was a time in many of these countries where you could continue using your old currency or you could exchange that old currency for euros and start using the euros early.

So there was a period of time in which both currencies were accepted, right? But during that time, the word was going out that this date is coming.

[ 6 : 47 ] February 28 is coming. February 28 is upon us. It's drawing near. And the time is now for you to exchange all of your old currency to get all of the new currency so that you'll be ready when that date comes because after that date passes, all of that old currency will just be worthless pieces of paper.

It'll have no value in the new economy. So there were people who recognized that, who saw clearly that that date was coming, who took appropriate measures to prepare, and there were people who didn't.

And so the Bible says that we are now in a time of overlap, right? Theologians call it the already but not yet, right? The old world order or the old economy is still in operation, right?

So sin and death are still factors. They're still realities. Injustice still exists. Exploitation still happens. And the old currencies are still in use.

Your intelligence, your popularity, your attractiveness, your race, your privilege, your education, your accomplishments, all of these forms of currency, in other words, all of these things that will get you something in this world, they have value in this world.

[ 8 : 11 ] They will, they're things that you can use to acquire other things, right? To give you access to other things. All of these forms of currency are, for the time being, still accepted in the world. And yet what Peter is saying is this, the kingdom of God has broken into this world.

And one day the old world is going to fully pass away and the kingdom will become the new world order, complete with a new economy and a new currency.

Does this make sense? So Jesus' entire earthly ministry, there's one way to look at it where you're saying, you know, Jesus did these miracles and why did he do the miracles? Well, to prove that he was the son of God.

No, in fact, he didn't seem really concerned with proving that he was the son of God. He simply was. Why did he do the miracles?

It was to give people a preview of what this new world order would look like. Every single miracle is meant to teach us what the new world order will be like.

[ 9 : 15 ] So he gives sight to the blind. Why? To show that in the new world order there will be no darkness. There will be no ignorance to the truth.

Right? He makes the lame walk. Why? To show that the kingdom will be a world in which no one is encumbered and paralyzed by sin and death. Right?

He raises the dead to show that in the kingdom there will be no more death. One day the water of this world will become the wine of the kingdom of God.

He's giving us a preview of that. In the kingdom economy, the proud will be made humble but the low will be lifted up. In the kingdom economy, the one who is willing to lose his life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel will gain it back in full but the one who tries to hold on to his life will lose it. In the new world order, in the kingdom, those who mourn will once and for all be comforted. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. The poor will become rich.

[10:19] The meek will inherit the earth. The last will become first. The outsiders will become the guests of honor. In the new world order of the kingdom of God, all of this is coming.

And so Peter is saying, the end of all things is near. The end of the old world order and the new world order, the new economy, the new kingdom has come. Therefore, we need to think clearly. We need to pray faithfully. And we need to exchange all of our old currency for the new currency of the kingdom. What is that currency? Love.

It's the only currency accepted in the new world order. That's why it goes on in verse 8 to say, above all, once you're thinking clearly, once you understand what's happening, once you understand that that date is quick approaching, exchange all of that old currency for the one currency that will matter.

Love. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. So he's saying this, our accomplishments, our wealth, our popularity, our success will all one day be worthless.

[11:32] Because in God's economy, love is the only currency. But it's the kind of love love that we do not generate, cannot create on our own. It's something that has to be given to us or entrusted to us.

It's a love that has to be given to us through Jesus Christ. And that's why earlier in his letter, Peter says in chapter 1, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

So by dying for us, by taking our place, by atoning for our sin, Jesus secures for us an inheritance. And you may think of that inheritance as a stockpile of the currency of the kingdom of God.

It's a kingdom inheritance. So here's the context of our stewardship to sort of answer the first question. The context of our stewardship is this, as we think about how do we use all that we have?

[12:46] How do we prioritize things in our lives? What comes first? What is the thing to which we put everything else under? What goes above all of that?

It's love because the old world order with its old economy is passing away and God's kingdom is replacing it. And the old currency in God's kingdom, I'm sorry, and the old currency is passing away and being replaced by the new currency of love.

And not just love, but gracious love. Love that doesn't come from us, but that is given like a gift to us. And as believers, we have been made stewards of that love.

So the next question we need to ask is this, what does that mean? Specifically as it relates to our spiritual gifts. Because if you read the passage, he goes on and he says, show hospitality without grumbling.

Absolutely. And then he goes on and what's the next thing we're called to do? Use our gifts like good stewards. And it's amazing if he's trying to distill, you know, have the right perspective, be thinking clearly, get your priorities in order.

[13:58] And one of the main things he focuses on is how we use our gifts. In other words, that figures prominently in what it means to be stewards anticipating the coming of the kingdom.

How we use our gifts. So this brings us to the second thing I want to focus on, the second half, the exercise of our stewardship. In other words, how do we actually go about it?

What does it mean to be a good steward? He says in verse 10, as each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks is one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves is one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. So the first point we see here is the good stewards, and this may seem obvious to some of you, but it's worth pointing out that good stewards, part of what it means to be a good steward is that you actually use what's been entrusted to you.

[15:04] You actually use it. And that's why I wanted to look at Matthew 25, this wonderful parable that Jesus tells about stewardship, the parable of the talents.

A wealthy man entrusts all of his money to three servants. He has five talents to one servant, two talents to another, one talent to a third. A talent is a very large sum of money, so we might as well think of it as five million dollars, two million dollars, and one million dollars.

A lot of money. And when he returns, after being away for a while, the master finds that the first two servants have actually used the talents. They've invested them well, and they've each made a return.

They've each doubled their investment, and they both are rewarded. Five talents becomes ten, two become four, they're both rewarded. Enter into the pleasure of your master.

But the third servant simply digs a hole in the ground, buries the talent, and then makes a bunch of excuses for why he didn't invest it. The master says, well, what happened?

[16:10] And if you notice, he actually blames the master. Well, I heard what kind of person you were. It's sort of a passive-aggressive way of saying, I did what I did, and it's your fault, right?

A little bit of blame shifting going on. Master's not having it, and so the master, of course, rewards the first two servants, but he condemns the third. You wicked and slothful servant.

Not holding back. And then the point of the parable comes in verse 29, for to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance.

But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Now that's a little confusing.

Let me put it in context for you. Think about your muscles. I don't know how often you think about your muscles, but think about your muscles now.

If you develop your muscles, if you use your muscles, if you invest your muscles in physical activity, then what is the reward that comes?

[17:13] The reward that comes is the increased capacity to do more. Right? So the more you use them, the more you gain a capacity. In other words, to you, more is given.

Right? But if you don't use your muscles, if you lie in bed all day long and binge watch Netflix and do that for days and days and days, then what happens?

Even what you have will be taken away. Right? They atrophy. Right? So remember, yesterday, we said that the spiritual gifts are the continued ministry of Jesus Christ in the world through individual Christians by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So take that image and apply it to this parable. Jesus is the master and he has divided his power or his ministry among all of his people.

Five talents, two talents, ten talents, fifteen talents. He's divided his ministry up. And we've each been entrusted, we've each been made stewards of spiritual gifts that actually belong to Jesus.

[18:24] And the same principle is true. The more we use our gifts, the more we invest in the life of the church, the more we prioritize building others up and bringing those outside the church in, the more we will grow in what we can do.

The more you use what you've been given, the more you will be able to do. But if we remain uninvolved, if we remain unengaged, if we remain unwilling to serve, no matter what excuses we may make, our gifts will atrophy.

Or the unknown gifts will remain dormant. So good stewards use what has been entrusted to them. they use. Now, I know yesterday I said that gifts are not the same thing as talents. But in this case, the talents represent the gifts.

Last night, we also learned make sure you get that in your notes. I think last night we also learned that there are gifts, there are talents, and there are varieties.

[19:32] God's very grace. God's very grace show. That's what we'll call it next year, the God's very grace show. But even some of those things that we may look down on, we may laugh at, we may think, oh, that's just some...

There are ways that God may be able to use that. If there's anything I want to impress upon you, it is not to underestimate what God can do through you. Even through the parts of you, the aspects of you that you think are simply silly, inconsequential, random, that God can use all of it.

But the question is, will you use all of it? Will you do that? Or will you let it atrophy? So what does a good steward do?

A good steward uses all that they've been given, not in ways that reflect their own preferences, but those that reflect the preferences of the owner.

that's what a good steward does. So Peter says, we should do all of this, what? In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 39 ] To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. The point is, our gifts are not about us, but about loving others in ways that glorify God. And if we lose this central focus, our gifts can quickly become about us.

Right? If we lose the focus that God is the one who enables it, God is the one who empowers it, and God's glory is the purpose for which it was all given to us. Loving others for God's glory.

If we lose that, then what happens is that our gifts begin to turn inward. Our gifts begin to become twisted. They begin to become distorted. They begin to point in the wrong direction.

Right? So those with the gift of leadership, leadership can be used to build up our own kingdoms rather than the kingdom of God. Right? The gift, the life-giving gift of encouragement can start to turn inward and become empty flattery.

Right? Genuine hospitality can give way to entertaining. You know, where the focus is on the beauty of your home and the quality of the cuisine rather than on strangers becoming friends and friends becoming family.

[ 21 : 53 ] They begin to turn inward. The gift of helping can become the need to be needed. Right? The gift of speaking can be used to build a cult of personality.

The gift of serving can give way to resentment. Right? These gifts that are meant to be life-giving for us and those whom we serve can turn inward and become destructive to us and those whom we may unintentionally harm.

So unless the glory of God is our central focus all of these gifts that are entrusted to us as stewards will become distorted turned inward and this is why it's crucial for us to remember and to remind one another that we are stewards and not owners of all that we have because a steward uses what they've been given in ways that reflect the values of the owner and not the steward.

So being a Christian as I said at the beginning is being a steward. To be a Christian is to be a steward. Our vision at Church of the Advent is every member of ministry where every single person in our church is actively serving and using their gifts fully for the common good.

And I hope it's clear by now at the end of the weekend that this isn't primarily because we need it.

Right? We could restructure our budget and decide to start hiring people to do all of the things that we need to do.

[ 23 : 26 ] Hire a setup crew and hire a cleanup crew and hire professionals to do all of this stuff.

Right? Just professionalize everything and you could just come and enjoy a well-produced service and hopefully get some meaning out of it and you know, you would maybe enjoy the fact that we would maybe have fewer technical difficulties and fewer glitches and fewer last-minute emergencies where we're scrambling and the vergers would no longer have to wonder will there be bread this week?

And we would have perfect bread and I could tear it and I would never even break a sweat and all of it could be smooth and polished and amazing and all of that would be incredible, right?

We could probably afford it. We would have to make some changes but we could probably do it. But our church would die. We would die.

We would die. We would fade away. So the point is not that we need you to serve because if you don't serve then things don't work right.

I mean, on the surface that's the reason. The real point is you need to serve. You need to be involved because it's your design as a steward of God's varied grace and love.

[ 24 : 41 ] If you don't use these gifts that God has given you, they will atrophy. So our priority is actually not just filling volunteer slots.

We want to structure our church in a way that requires you. The whole design of the church is meant to require that people serve because we are a body and you are cells in that body like we talked about yesterday.

And what that gives you is not only the opportunity to grow and to learn your gifts but it gives you the tremendous fulfillment and joy in seeing the ways that God can use you.

If you're made to serve and to meet needs in that way then when you do it it will bring you joy and you will get to see what God does. You'll get to sense what it's like to be part of something great that God is doing in the world.

So for those of you who are already deeply involved and many of you are and by the way you've seen people even this weekend serving and setting up and cleaning up food and running sound and running the check-in and caring for our kids and all of the various ways that people have been serving you should congratulate them and thank them and tell them how much you appreciate them.

[ 25 : 53 ] If you're already serving then I pray that as you do that God would clarify for you the ways that he's gifted you to serve. The ways that he has empowered you to bring life to his body and I pray that God would empower you for all that you're doing.

If you're not if you're still sort of on the periphery if you're trying to figure out whether or not you want to become more involved if you're not yet playing a significant role in the life of our church in any way I know that there are a lot of great reasons for that out there.

So this isn't a time to point fingers or to turn any screws but you should at least reflect on this question. Are you investing in currency of the old world that will one day be meaningless or are you investing in things that will last into God's kingdom things that will have value in an economy where the only currency that matters is the currency of God's love.

And I want to leave you with that question and close us in prayer. Lord we do thank you that even as we talk about stewardship even as we talk about what it means to be oriented toward your glory we have the greatest example of that in your son Jesus Christ.

Lord who is the ultimate steward who took all that you had entrusted to him laid down his own life to see it through Lord. We thank you for the beauty of that we thank you for the beauty and the hope of the gospel we thank you for the coming of your new kingdom and I pray that for everybody here not just not just in this church but that you would give us all a vision for what good stewardship looks like in our jobs in our vocations that you've called us to Lord in every sphere of vocation that we would think as stewards that we would recognize all that we have all the access we have all the opportunities we have as things to be stewarded for your kingdom.

[ 27 : 52 ] Lord I pray that this would be real in our church community and I pray it would be real as far as you scatter us around the world in all of the varied ways that you've called us to serve the common good of this world.

Lord we pray that you would infuse us with power and bless us with an awareness of the ways that each one of us is called to serve in unity as your kingdom breaks into this world.

And we pray this in your son's holy name. Amen.